Managing Stress at Work Place

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ABSTRACT

There are many occupational stress management strategies available which are designed to prevent and cure the negative aspects of job-stress. The focus of the strategies can be directed towards the individual worker, the working group, the organization of the work or the organization as a whole. Moreover, strategies show a considerable variation with respect to the type of interventions they promote and their underlying assumptions, as well as their duration and costs. In this paper, the aim is to give an overview of the variety in occupational stress strategies, their sources and their effects of stress.

Keywords: Occupational Stress, Stress Management, Sources, Effects.

I.INTRODUCTION

"Know the true value of time; snatch, seize and enjoy every moment of it."- Lord Chesterfield

Concept of Stress
Stress was first introduced by Hans Selye in 1936. He later broadened and popularized the concept to include inappropriate physiological response to any demand. In his usage stress refers to a condition and stressor to the stimulus causing it. It covers a wide range of phenomena, from mild irritation to drastic dysfunction that may cause severe health breakdown. Different people have different views about stress as different people experience it from a variety of sources. Stress indicates the pressures people feel in life. The presence of stress at work is almost inevitable in many jobs. As a result of the pressures, employees develop various symptoms of stress that can harm their job performance. People who are stressed may become nervous, easily provoked to anger & are unable to relax. Stress also leads to physical disorders because the internal body system changes to try to cope with stress. Job Stress is a condition arising from the interaction of people and their jobs and characterized by changed within people that force them to deviate from their normal functioning.

Symptoms of Stress
Stress shows itself in a number of ways. These can be subsumed under three general categories:
Physiological Psychological Behavioural

Sources of Stress
The potential sources of stress can be summarized by the following factors-

II. ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS

Environmental uncertainty influences the design of the organisation's structure. It also influences stress levels among employees in that organization.
Economic Uncertainties:
Changes in the business cycle create economic uncertainties. When the economy is contracting, people become increasingly anxious about their security.
Political Uncertainties:- Political uncertainties are also the probable source of stress.
Technological Uncertainties:- New innovations can make an employee's skill and experience obsolete in a very short period of time. Technological uncertainty is thus a factor which causes stress.

III. ORGANISATIONAL FACTORS

There is no shortage of factors that cause stress. Pressures to avoid errors or complete task in a limited time period, work overload, a demanding & insensitive superior and unpleasant coworkers are a few examples.

Organisation Structure:
 It provides formal relationships among individuals in an organization. Any defect in organization structure like lack of opportunity of participation in decision making, lack of opportunity for advancement, high degree of specialization, excessive interdependence of various departments etc.

Organisational Leadership:
 It represents the managerial style of the organisation's senior executives. Some chief executive officers create a culture characterized by tension, fear and anxiety. They establish unrealistic pressures to perform in the short run impose excessively tight controls and routinely fire employees.

Organisational Processes:
 Organisational processes also affect individual bahaviour at work. Faulty organizational processes like poor communication, poor and inadequate feedback of work performance, conflicting roles, unfair control systems, inadequate information flow etc cause stress for people in the organization.

Organisational Policies:
 Policies provides guidelines for action. Unfavourable and ambiguous policies may affect the functioning of the individuals adversely and they may experience stress.

Physical Conditions:
 Organisational physical conditions affect work performance. Thus, poor physical conditions like crowding and lack of privacy, excessive noise, excessive heat or cold, safety hazards, poor lighting etc. produce stress on people.

Task Demands: Task demands are factors related to a person's job. They include the design of the individual's job autonomy, task variety, degree of automation and the physical work layout. The more interdependence between a person's tasks and the tasks of others, the more potential stress there is.

Role Demands: Role demands relate to pressures placed on a person as a function of the particular role he plays in the organization. Role ambiguity is created when role expectations are not clearly understood and the employee is not sure what he is to do.

Interpersonal Demands: Interpersonal demands are pressures created by other employees. Lack of social support from colleagues and poor interpersonal relationship can cause considerable stress, especially among employees with a high social need.

IV. INDIVIDUAL FACTORS

Individual factors such as family issues, economic issues, personal characteristics, life and career changes and role perceptions create stress in different forms at different levels.

Family Issues:
Family issues which cause stress are the marital difficulties, the breaking of a relationship and discipline troubles with children that create stress on employees.

Economic Problems:
Economic problems created by individuals over-extending their financial resources are another set of personal troubles that can create stress for employees and distract their attention from their work.

Personal Characteristics:
It includes personality traits such as masculinity, extroversion, rigidity, spontaneity etc which are potent causes of stress. These factors in themselves create tension and confusion. These traits are known as 'Type a personality'. On the contrary, 'Type B personality' is not very sensitive and is a less potent cause of stress. Type B personality has patience and coolness which are required for top executives.

Life and Career Changes:
Life and career changes are stress producing. Fast changes are more dangerous than the slow changes. Heart attacks are commonly observed in the case of fast changes in life and careers. Economic and social problems are attached with life changes.

Role Perceptions: Individuals have multiple roles to perform successfully. He comes into contact with stress as it is difficult to perform equally well in all the diverse roles. In a job, for example, he has to face role ambiguity, poor communication, role conflicts and overloads of different roles.

V. GROUP FACTORS

Group interaction affects human behaviour. An organization includes group and individuals who influence each other and are influenced by the other. They cause stress and reduce it as well. Lack of group cohesiveness, lack of social support and group conflicts are potential causes of stress.

Lack of Group Cohesiveness:
 Group cohesiveness is important for the satisfaction of individuals in group interaction. When they are denied the opportunity for this cohesiveness, it becomes very stressing for them as they get negative reaction from group members.

Lack of Social Support:
 When individuals get social support from members of the group, they are able to satisfy their social needs and they are better off. When this social support does not come, it becomes stressing for them.

Group Conflicts:

Any conflict arising out of group interaction may become stressing for the individuals, be it interpersonal conflict among the group members or intergroup conflict.

Effects of Stress:

At the optimum level of stress (Eustress), the performance is maximum. It is lower in the case of very low level stress and still lower in very high level stress. Though optimum level of stress may be different for different individuals, each individual can determine how much stress is functional for him to operate in a productive manner. High level of stress (distress) causes physical, psychological and behavioural problems.

Physical Effects:

The impact of stress is mostly visible on one's body. Stress causes physical reactions, including autonomic, excitability of nerves, increased heart beat rate and a decrease in body temperature. These symptoms do not directly influence an individual's performance on his job. There is no direct link between job stress and physical problems because extraordinary factors also influence the stress level.

Psychological Effects:

Stress affects the body as well as the mind of a person. The effects of psychological reactions of individuals may be changes in mood and other emotional states, lowered self esteem, inability to concentrate and make decisions and job dissatisfaction. They affect productivity in the organization adversely.

Behavioural Effects:

People show dysfunctional behaviour because of stress of high level. Such behaviour may be in the form of alcoholism, drug addiction, increased smoking, sleeplessness, under/over eating etc. In extreme cases, when the individual is not able to bear stress, it may result into suicide. At the workplace, people may show behaviour like tardiness, absenteeism and turnover. In all these cases, organization is going to suffer.

Stress Management Strategies (ways to reduce stress):

Stress is inevitable in human life. There is therefore no way out but to cope with stress or fight with it. There are two types of strategies that can help the employee to cope with stress, namely the coping strategies at the organization level & the coping strategies at the individual level.

Individual Coping Strategies:

Under individual strategies, employees take personal responsibilities for reducing their respective stress. They try to prevent the stress as well as to reduce the stress. Following are the major individual coping strategies-

Physical Exercise: Routine and relaxed exercises reduce the tension of employees. Physical exercise is a good strategy to get body fit and to overcome stress. Physical exercises of different types, such as walking, jogging, swimming, playing, Yoga etc. are good methods of overcoming stress.

Relaxation: Impact of stress can be overcome by relaxation. Individuals can teach themselves to relax through techniques such as meditation, hypnosis and bio-feedback. Fifteen to twenty minutes a day of deep relaxation releases tension and provides a person with a pronounced sense of peacefulness.

Social Support: People are benefitted by social support. It reduces job stress. Good listeners and confidence builders are essential for managing stress. The expansion of social support network is a means of reducing tension.

Work Home Transition: Work home transition is also like a relaxation technique. In this technique, a person may attend to less pressure inducing type or routine work during the last 30 or 60 minutes of work time. For instance, during the last hour of work, the person can review the day's activities; list the priorities of the activities that need to be attended to the next day. Thus, he can finish his day's work and come back in relaxed manner.

Behavioural Self Control: Learning and personality development help manage tension. Proper behaviour prevents stress. Behaviour has a direct impact on performance which causes satisfaction and stress.

Cognitive Therapy: A number of psychological techniques are used to keep employees free from stress. Physiological and emotional responses are recognized for increasing work efficiency. Cognitive strategy helps the self control of people.

Time Management: Time management is an effective technique of managing stress. Many people manage the time poorly. The things they have to accomplish in any given day are not necessarily beyond completion if they manage their time properly.

VI. ORGANISATIONAL COPING STRATEGIES

Organisational strategies include the ways and means attached with the organizational structure, goal setting, designing and redesigning of jobs, improved communication, employees involvement and other organizational strategies for reducing stress. Following are the major organizational coping strategies-

Selection and Placement:

As certain jobs are more stressful than others, the individuals differ in their response to stress situations. The individuals with little experience or an external locus of control tend to be more stress prone. Selection and placement decisions should take these facts into consideration.

Reducing Conflicts:

Role ambiguity is the main cause of conflict. The expectation-performance relation, performance award relations and organizational attitudes are well defined to reduce any sort of ambiguity and misunderstanding.

Supportive Organizational Climate:

Supportive organizational climate depends upon managerial leadership rather than the use of power and money to control organizational behaviour. The focus is primarily on participation and involvement of employees in decision making process. Such a climate develops belongingness among people which helps them reduce their stress.

Providing Counseling:

Counseling is an exchange of ideas and feelings between two persons or parties. It helps the employees to cope with problems and improve the organizational performance. Personal counseling has been a permanent function of many organizations. It solves the problems of the employees while at work or at home. Counseling has proved an important factor of stress management.

Job Redesign:

Redesigning jobs to give employees more responsibility, more meaningful work, more autonomy and increased feedback can reduce stress.

Job Enrichment: A major source of stress is the monotonous and disinteresting jobs being performed by employees in the organization. Employees are aware of their respective variety of skills, task identity, task significance, autonomy and feedback. Enriched tasks reduce stress. Enriched jobs motivate many growth-oriented employees, whereas the non growth-oriented people get job stress.

Goal Setting:

Goal incompatibility creates stress. Therefore, it is essential to set the goals to avoid stress and conflict. Individuals perform better when they have specific and challenging goals. Goals provide motivation to work.

Career Planning:

The employees' development is an essential feature of stress management. An employee with a developed outlook and skill can perform better without stress.

Organisational Communication:

Increased formal communication with employees reduces uncertainty by lessening role ambiguity and role conflict. Management can use effective communication as a means to shape employee perceptions.

Stress Control Workshops and Employee Assistance Programmes:

The organization can hold periodical workshops for control and reduction of stress. Such workshops may help individuals to learn the dynamics of stress and methods of overcoming its ill effects.

Participative Decision Making:

By giving these employees a voice in those decisions that directly affect their job performances, management can increase employee control and reduce this role stress. So, managers should consider increasing employee participation in decision making.

Ten Characteristics of Highly Effective Stress Psychologists

They Know How To Relax.

They eat right/healthy & exercise often. They take enough sleep.

They don't worry about the unimportant. They don't get angry often.

They are well organized.

They manage their time efficiently.

They make use of a strong social support system. They live according to their values.

They have a good sense of humor.

Twelve Stress Management Tips

Create a "to do" list for the next day. Leave your work problems at work. Leave your home problems at home. Take a relaxing walk.

Listen to the relaxing music.

Ready a chapter forms a good book. Make & follow schedules.

Get organized & clear out the things. Prioritize projects

Delegate when appropriate Don't ever procrastinate

Motivate & be good to yourself.

CONCLUSION

It is vital that stress management techniques are implemented into our daily lives. As mentioned earlier, some stress is good, but we need to find that optimal level of stress, which will motivate but not overwhelm us. Coping with stress is an individualized task and one method over another may not be superior, so find what works for you and master it. A person that is stressed takes so much away from his or her health and performance levels. Reducing stress could be as simple has adding exercise to you day or making new friends. To make the most of your life, limit your stress and of course for that stress that you cannot diminish, learn to manage it.

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